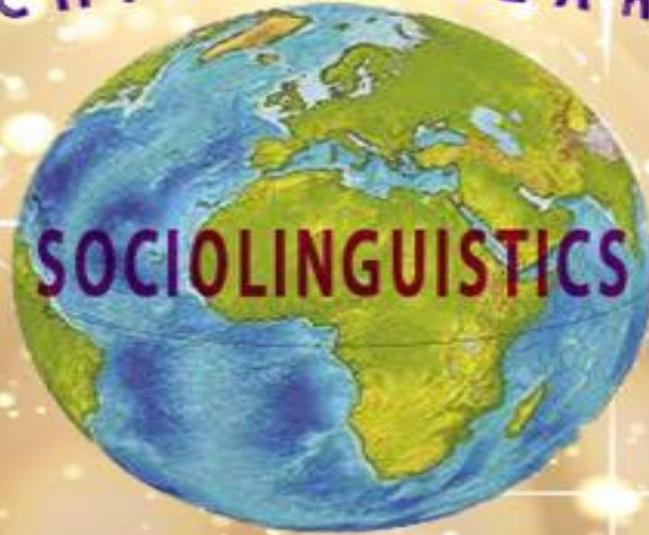


THE TEACHING & LEARNING OF

SOCIOLINGUISTICS



Words and Culture

M.A. ELIT

OUTLINE

- Introduction
- Language and culture
- Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis
- FAQ's
- Conclusion

WHAT IS LANGUAGE?

- Language- is a system of sounds, words or signs that people use to express thoughts and feelings to each other

WHAT IS CULTURE?

- Culture- is the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, that members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation.

INTRODUCTION

The exact nature of the relationship between language and culture has fascinated, and continues to fascinate, people from a wide variety of backgrounds.

That there should be some kind of relationship between the sounds, words, and syntax of a language and the ways in which speakers of that language experience the world and behave in it seems so obvious as to be a truism.

- A few words are necessary concerning what I mean by 'culture.' I do not intend to use the term *culture* in the sense of 'high culture,' i.e., the appreciation of music, literature, the arts, and so on. Rather, I intend to use it in the sense of whatever a person must know in order to function in a particular society. This is the same sense as in Goodenough's well-known definition (1957, p. 167): 'a society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and to do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves.' That knowledge is socially acquired: the necessary behaviors are learned and do not come from any kind of genetic endowment. Culture, therefore, is the 'know-how' that a person must possess to get through the task of daily living; only for a few does it require a knowledge of some, or much, music, literature, and the arts

Edward Sapir Benjamin Lee Whorf



"Language is not only for expression but also helps organise our thought. Diverse languages impose different conceptual categories on their speakers."

EDWARD SAPIR (1884-1939)

- Pronunciation: shu PEER
- American anthropologist-linguist; a leader in American structural linguistics.
- Author of language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech
- Born in Lauenberg, Germany
- Pupil of Franz Boaz, teacher of Benjamin Whorf

- Sapir studied languages of the Pacific coast of North America; his work was comparable to Descriptivism but differed from Behaviorism; patterns revealed by linguistic analysis were patterns in speakers' minds.

- “language shapes the way think and determines what we can think about.”

-Benjamin Lee Whorf-

DOES LANGUAGE SHAPE THE WAY WE THINK?

- [sw hypothesis\VIDEOS\sapirwhorf.mp4](#)

BENJAMIN LEE WHORF

- He graduated from the MIT in 1918 with a degree in Chemical Engineering and shortly afterwards began work as a fire prevention engineer (inspector)
- Although he met, and later studied with Edward Sapir, he never took up linguistics as a profession
- Whorf's primary area of interest in linguistics was the study of native American languages.

- He became quite well known for his work on the Hopí language.
- He was considered to be a captivating speaker and did much to popularize his linguistic ideas through popular lectures and articles written to be accessible to lay readers.
- Whorf - detailed analysis of certain American Indian languages
- The worldview is molded by language

SAPIR-WHORF HYPOTHESIS 1

- The structure of one's language influences the manner in which one perceives and understands the world
- Therefore, speakers of different languages will perceive the world differently

LINGUISTIC RELATIVITY

- People who speak different languages perceive and experience the world differently relative to their linguistic backgrounds.
- The principle of linguistic relativity holds that the structure of a language affects its speakers' world view or cognition.

Popularly known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, or Whorfianism, the principle is often defined to include two versions.

- Structural differences between languages are paralleled by non-linguistic cognitive differences (the structure of the language itself effects cognition)
- The number and the type of the basic colour words of a language determine how a subject sees rain bow

SAPIR-WHORF HYPOTHESIS 2

LINGUISTIC DETERMINISM

The language we use determines the way we view and think about the world around us. Learning a new language changes our ways of thinking.

- The structure of a language can strongly influence or determine someone's world view
- A world view describes a (hopefully) consistent and integral sense of existence and provides a theoretical framework for generating, sustaining and applying knowledge
- The *Inuit* can think more intelligently about snow because their language contains more sophisticated and subtle words distinguishing various forms of it, etc.

ARBITRARINESS

- The semantic systems of different languages vary without constraint.
- This hypothesis must be tacitly assumed, because otherwise the claim that Linguistic Relativity makes is rather undramatic.

ARRIVAL

- [sw hypothesis\VIDEOS\ARRIVAL- Linguistic Relativity & Time Perception Are Real.mp4](#)

CRITICISM

- Whorf's inability to allow for the radical changes of world-view within a given linguistic community.
- The history of science has been a history of repeated radical changes of world-view, almost all of which occurred within the Standard Average European linguistic framework.

- Language of a community ↔ thought of individual members
- How individual influences language?
- Sapir - individuals being 'at the mercy of' their language; 'tyrannical hold' over their mind
- Whorf - speakers are parties to an 'absolutely obligatory' agreement to conceptualize the world in a certain way

So far so good?

1. Some cognitive tasks may be affected by implicit access to the participants' native language (hence the importance to use non-linguistic tasks).
2. Differences in non-linguistic tasks may be the result of 'life-experience' due to background difference, rather than languages.
3. Behavioural measurements only show the 'end-product' of cognitive processes.

CONCLUSION

- We categorize based on our language
- We allow our language to preempt the decisions we make
- We are not “helpless prisoners” of our language

“language produces transient modulation of ongoing perceptual processing – the label-feedback effect” (Lupyan, 2012).

- [SociolinguisticsREP.pptx](#)